A Letter From The Rabbi- December 2020

Shalom, mishpachah; Dear family,

As all those old jokes go, you want the good news or the bad news?

Three different pharmaceutical manufacturers have announced that their vaccines appear to be effective against the coronavirus that causes COVID-19. Six have actually been approved for early or limited use, and 13 are in large scale clinical trials of their effectiveness.

At the same time, the rate of new infections across our country spiked so badly that one national news publication had to revise the color scheme of its maps because much of our country was showing up as one uniform shade of red for “highest.” Our Hoosier state’s daily new infections rate did not reach 4,000 new cases in a single day until recently, on November 5. Just one week later, on November 11, we spiked to 5,000 new cases.

Which is why, when we celebrated Moses Fineman’s being called to the Torah as a Bar Mitzvah I felt an unfamiliar emotion along with the usual joy and relief: dread. A few weeks earlier, the worship committee, the family, and I had decided to make that Shabbat morning of November 14 our first hybrid worship service – that is, one that would take place simultaneously online and in person, for a few members of the Fineman family only. We were all hopeful that soon we’d be hosting more such hybrid worship services and events.

And then the pandemic graphs took yet another a sickening lurch upwards. As I’m writing this, Indiana’s daily total of new cases is trending down again, but after setting a horrifying record of more than 6,000 new cases/day.

So: you want the good news or the bad news?

This week, Mickie Gurvis and I participated in a seminar called “Both/And: Maximizing worship experiences for online and in-person audiences.”  Our service on Shabbat Chayei Sarah, November 14, will not be the only hybrid worship experience we’re going to have. We’ll continue to evaluate the issues in both/and worship and try to get ready to make it equally accessible whether we are attending in person or from home. (The game can be exciting whether we watch in person or on TV even though the experience is very different; the same may be true for our worship.) Even after we triumph over this nasty virus, we’ll probably always offer an online option.

At the same time, this is probably not the time to resume in-person worship. On the day of the bar mitzvah celebration I could say that only members of the family could attend, and fewer than 10 people in total. But on a typical Friday night, how do we say who gets to come and who must stay home? I am grateful for your patience. Meanwhile, Juliette and I will do all we can to keep our online worship fresh and engaging.

I find myself looking forward to Chanukah, our festival of lights, not just for itself but also for the renewal of hope it represents.

Rabbi Justin  
!בַּקֵּשׁ שָׁלוֹם וְרָדְפֵהוּ  
Bakesh shalom v’rod’fei’hu!  
Seek peace and pursue it! — Psalms 34:15